

Pony Express: Its Deeds Live On

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horses were recruited to make the Pony Express work. In 1860, express riders rode in the untamed West with hostile Indians, menacing white renegades and the unsplittable elements posing danger down each trail.

Ad for Riders

An advertisement describing the service also carried a small recruitment notice which outlined the qualifications the company was looking for: "Young skinny, wiry fellows anxious for adventure and chance to see our great West. Must be expert riders, willing to risk death daily. Orphans preferred, \$60 per month and keep."

Riders were small men put on the largest horses possible. Those were no ponies in any sense of the word. They were the finest money could buy and many were purchased at Kimball's Ranch, about 18 miles east of Salt Lake City at a reported price of \$200 each. The horses ridden by express riders were far superior to the Indian mounts and their speed and dependability probably did more than anything else to preserve the lives of the riders on the trail.

While a rider on the trail in Indian country would be in danger, the speed of his grain-fed horse would be enough to outdistance the poorly bred grass-fed Indian horses. Riders were instructed by the company never to fight but to outdistance Indians or outlaws whenever possible.

Horse and rider traveled light. The combined weight of the saddle, bridle and saddle bags was less than 14 pounds. The bag used for carrying the mail was called a mochila. It fit over the saddle and had four pockets called cantinas in which the mail was put. All pockets were kept locked and the mochila was transferred by the rider from one horse to another until the trip was ended.

15-Pound Average

Mail was wrapped in oil cloth to protect it from the elements and the sweat of horses. An average of 15 pounds of mail was carried, although the company allowed up to 20 pounds of mail to be loaded. Postage rates were high at \$5 for each half-ounce, but the rate was dropped to \$1 and remained there until the line went out of business in October 1861.

Most of the mail went from the West to the East and consisted of news dispatches for eastern newspapers and correspondence for the government and businessmen. Riders were paid as much as \$125 a month with a few who had braved a particular run receiving small bonuses for the month. Station men and their assistants were paid as much as \$100 a month. Few riders were killed on the trail, but many station operators living in isolation were killed by mauling Indians.

Record Run

The record established by the Pony Express was in getting President Abraham Lincoln's inaugural speech across the continent in March 1861. Inspired by the anxiety of Californians for the message, riders resolved to surpass all previous performances and completed the 1,966 miles in just seven days and 17 hours. An average speed of 10 and six-tenths miles an hour through the deserts, plains and mountains was attained.

Riders joining the Pony

Express were presented a Bible by Russell, Majors and Waddell and were asked to take the following oath: "I, ..., do hereby swear, before the Great and Living God, that during my engagement, and while I am an employee of Russell, Majors and Waddell, I will under no circumstances, use profane language; that I will drink no intoxicating liquors; that I will not quarrel or fight with any other employee of the firm, and

Robyn Burt, Salt Lake District, BLM.

THESE Bicentennial project "trail markers" are located throughout Utah's western deserts as they mark the route of the historic Pony Express. Pictured above is Robyn Burt, Salt Lake District, BLM.





PONY EXPRESS Monument at the Willow Springs Station in Tooele County is similar to the one at the Simpson Springs Station. The markers were built in the late 1930's by the Civilian Conservation

Corps to mark the original Pony Express trail across the country. The Willow Springs Station operated from April 3, 1860 until Oct. 27, 1861.

conduct myself honestly, be faithful to my duties, and so direct all my acts as to win the confidence of my employers, so help me God."

On Oct. 18, 1861, oaths, good faith and diligence notwithstanding, the end had come for the Pony Express. On that date in Salt Lake City telegraph wires joining East with West were connected at the telegraph office on Main Street.

The venture lost a lot of money, estimated to be at least \$200,000. It was expensive to maintain, costing more than \$1,000 a day and rarely carrying more than \$1,000 in mails in a single day. Supplies had to be transported to remote way stations and \$75,000 of the company's money was spent fighting an Indian war in Nevada with no help from the government.

For 18 months the Pony Express and its riders faithfully discharged their duties by making 308 runs totaling 616,000 miles and carrying 34,753 letters with only one mochila lost.

